



**ACRULeT**  
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Students' Soft Skills Achievement in Malaysian Public  
Higher Education Institutions

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## **Integrating English Language into Legal Studies at an Omani College: Inspirations and Aspirations**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Ever since its establishment in 1997, the College of Law formerly known as the College of Sharia and Law at Sultan Qaboos University has been heavily criticized for the lack of English language skills of its graduates, who have either failed to impress their employers or struggled to find jobs related to the legal field which has had negative implications for the Omanization process. English language in Oman is the only official foreign language and a significant tool for achieving multiple uses and values. This triggered a strong call for change by Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and the College of Law administration to integrate English language into various legal courses offered at the college. This article discusses the steps and decisions taken by the decision makers at SQU and the College of Law to introduce the necessary changes to cater for the needs of the job market to help contribute to the development of Oman's economy. The discussion may have implications for change in other similar contexts around the world.*

**Keywords:** College of Law, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman, International Review and Assessment Committee Report, content language integrated learning, English language

## **INTRODUCTION**

“You are aware of the extent of the attention we accord to the development of human resources in order to provide our young sons and daughters with wider and better opportunities of education, training and employment... There can be no doubt that the human being is the basic component and the cornerstone of any viable civilisation. We, therefore, once again reaffirm the importance of this element in the development and modernisation of the society.” (Extract from a Speech of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Sultan of Oman before the opening of the Annual Session of the Council of Oman on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2006)

Education in the Sultanate of Oman is a top priority and considered as a fundamental tool for modernization and nation-building. Education has been a cornerstone for Omanization; a process through which the expatriate labour force is gradually replaced by qualified and skilled Omani manpower, bearing in mind that, according to the 2010 national census, Oman’s population is 2.8 million, including 800,000 foreigners. The opening of the College of Law in Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in 1997, previously known as the College of Sharia (Islamic Law) and Law (1997-2005), came as an important implementation for this national policy.

However, there have been repeated verbal and informally voiced complaints and general consensus amongst stakeholders, high-ranking and key officials, and professionals in the local private and public legal field about the college graduates’ lack of practical skills in various aspects of Law and English language. An example of the practical skills is standing before the court to argue or plead a case and provide evidence or proof. Meanwhile, examples of English language skills are reading and understanding different documents about law such as cases and correspondences, writing different legal texts such as memoirs, correspondences, consultations and pleadings as well as using interactive English for legal and everyday communication purposes, particularly with foreign non-Arabic speaking clients.

It is important to note that there are no statistics of those who have been unemployed until now, as Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) does not keep any record of its alumni. However, such information has informally originated from the college’s graduates who have been in constant touch with

the researcher. This situation has generated dissatisfaction among graduates and has had negative implications for their recruitment and performance in law-related jobs. This is a concern as Oman, a developing oil-producing country with such a small population has decided to open its doors to foreign businesses and investments and international relationships. Different international law firms thus have branches in Oman and employ foreign lawyers with skills in law and operational command of English, which has undesirable implications for the implementation of Omanization. English in Oman is thus a *lingua franca* and the only official foreign language and a significant tool for national development and modernization. It has received legislative support from the government and has institutionalized domains like business, education and the media. People in Oman learn English for various purposes: inter-lingual communication, travelling to non-Arabic speaking countries, science and technology acquisition, cultural analysis and understanding, business, finding a white-collar job and pursuing higher education domestically and abroad.

The World Bank development report (2008) on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries reveals that there is a mismatch between the level of those who exit the current MENA education systems and the development objectives. Maroun, Samman, Moujaes & Abouchakra (2008) criticize the quality of education in the Arab World for falling behind other regions like Asia and Latin America, for example, and argue that it needs urgent reform to tackle the unemployment “crisis”, which this developing part of the world is experiencing (Al-Dhafiry, 2003) and which is comparatively higher than other areas in the world. Maroun et al. (2008) attribute unemployment in the region mainly to lack of skills.

Al-Dhafiry (2003) and Al-Suwaidi (2010) are critical of the educational strategies implemented by the governments of the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCCC) for failing to meet the job market requirements. Al-Suwaidi argues that globalization requires college and university to equip their graduates with skills. He reports that 70% of the jobs available in the GCCC market at present are operated by expatriate labor force and that US \$50 billion is earned by the Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan) labor force annually as a result of occupying jobs which should be filled by the GCCC citizens in the first place. Al-Dhafiry (2003) and Al-Suwaidi (2010) stress that the lack of alignment between the graduates and

the job market requirements has led to unemployment which has negative implications for the social structure of the GCCC. Al-Suwaidi holds the GCCC governments accountable for failing to develop a strategy and vision to link education with the local job market.

The World Bank development report (2008) acknowledges that high levels of investment in education in MENA countries have failed to positively affect economic growth due to low quality education. The UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2007) ranks Oman 82 out of 125 countries on the Education Development Index. This implies that the Sultanate's education investment has failed to translate into the desired outcome.

## **BACKGROUND**

The College of Law was established in 1997 under the name of College of Sharia and Law by a Royal Decree and was supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education. There were two departments then; Sharia and Law. The College used to award a Bachelor degree in Sharia and Law, depending on a student's major. The normal procedure for establishing a higher educational institution in Oman involved the President of the Board of Trustees; the Minister of Higher Education who in 1992 instructed the officials concerned to hire a team of academic experts to plan the program. Experts from Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and Morocco in addition to a few Omanis from SQU were contacted to formulate a plan for the college using their knowledge, expertise and international models. Visits were arranged for the non-Omani team members to collect empirical data from different decision makers and stakeholders about the project. It took the team about four years to produce the first draft of the plan. Another team of Arab experts was then hired to revise and amend the plan produced by the preceding team, prior to its final approval.

However, a decision was made a few years later to abandon the specialization in Sharia and confine the mission of the college to teaching Law for a number of reasons. First, the Institute of Sharia Sciences was already established some time prior to the establishment of the college and it was affiliated to the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious affairs. Upon



completion of its program, students were awarded a degree in Sharia to work either as Religious Guides or Mosque Preachers (Imam), jobs which are not fit for women under any circumstances in a Muslim and Arab context. Second, the College of Education at SQU accepts students majoring in Sharia in the Department of Sharia and they graduate as teachers of Islamic Studies. It became clear that there was an overlapping of duties among the three places which led to an excess of graduates with a Sharia degree who found themselves unemployed. This was particularly the case with female students who left the College and enrolled in a Diploma in Education program at SQU or Nizwa University (a local private university) at their own expense to be teachers of Islamic Studies.

As a result, the College of Sharia and Law was affiliated to SQU in 2006 by a Royal Decree and its name was changed to the College of Law. Its enrolment capacity increased from 120 students per academic year to 140 students and 160 in the subsequent year. This number rose to 200 students in September 2012. The Dean of the College then, an Egyptian Professor of Administrative Law, who had been in Oman for a few months only was asked by the College Board of Trustees which was chaired by the Chair of SQU Council and the Minister of Higher Education to formulate a new degree plan that would confine the mission of the college to teaching English language across the legal curriculum. The plan was approved by the College Board of Trustees despite the lack of proposal development, staff conference, feedback and external evaluation which were considered as standard application procedures and guidelines for proposal planning and implementation. The faculty at the college was concerned as their voices and opinions were ignored, resulting in a seminar conducted by SQU under the auspices of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of SQU for Academic and Community Service Affairs. A number of decision makers representing both sectors attended the seminar which was considered as an opportunity by the faculty and guests to make themselves heard. The seminar highlighted the plan to establish three specializations: Public Law, Private Law, and Commercial Law based on examples from Tunisia, Morocco and Ukraine. The plan was viewed as unsuitable due to lack of evidence about the efficiency and success of such programs and it was formulated against internationally recognized and implemented procedures. The plan was however approved by the top management.

In 2007, three specializations: Public Law, Private Law, and Commercial Law were established and students were required to major in one of these in Year Three of the four-year program. Commercial Law students were taught 16 courses in English spread over the last two years of the program. They graduated with an edge in English language over the students of the other two specializations which helped them to find jobs easier and quicker than their counterparts. As far as graduates of Public Law and Private Law were concerned, there was shocking reaction from the job market regarding the difficulty of hiring graduates of either major due to their evident lack of knowledge in some fundamental aspects and branches of Law and English language. The college found itself in a state of crisis and hence was forced to temporarily and quickly fix the problem. This resulted in opening a fourth section called General Law where instruction was in Arabic. All students majoring in the Public and Private Law withdrew from these two specializations and transferred to General Law, which inevitably led to the closing down of these two majors. It is noteworthy that all four majors had their flaws and discrepancies with respect to curriculum design and structure and failed to satisfy the requirements and demands of the local competitive job market.

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AT THE COLLEGE**

In an earlier study, in fact, the only study conducted about the college so far, Al-Issa (2007) found that students at the College of Law learn English for everyday interactive use in different contexts. They read different texts from a variety of sources, read different texts about Law from different sources, make contact with English for cultural analysis and understanding, pursue their postgraduate education and find a white-collar job in the public and private sector.

English language teaching (ELT) at the College of Law has thus evolved over the past 15 years or so, with six different academic plans being implemented. English has always been taught in its “general” form at the College of Law. “General” here refers to teaching the language for general proficiency and like a “school subject”, where students in many cases do not see the target language’s relevance for their future and their motivation for learning the language is almost entirely driven by passing

exams. Additionally, problems pertinent to insufficient contact time on the curriculum, class size (45-55 students per class) and lack of printed materials reduced students' chances significantly of better language acquisition and development also existed (Al-Issa, 2007).

Thus, while in Plan One (1997-2000), English was allocated five "contact" hours but three "credit" hours in the curriculum, English was allocated three "contact" hours and three "credit" hours in the curriculum starting from Plan Two-Six (2001-2010). While the "contact" hour refers to the formal time spent on teaching a particular subject in the classroom on weekly basis (one contact hour is equivalent to 50 teaching minutes), the "credit" hour is related to determining the marks scored and the accumulative average score reached by a student in that subject. In other words, the more credit hours allocated to a particular subject, the more weight that subject carries towards the student's overall accumulative average score on a scale of four points (four is the highest point and is equivalent to Grade A while one is the lowest and is equivalent to Grade D). For example, if a student scores Grade A in English in one of the semesters, he/she receives 12 points (maximum), which is the result of multiplying the "three" credit hours allocated to English language by Grade A, which is equivalent to four points in the credit point system. The highest number of hours allocated to any subject on the College plan is three, while the lowest is zero. When the subject receives zero credit hour, the student is just required to pass the subject, or score 50 out of 100, as his/her score in this subject does not count towards his/her accumulative average score.

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE INTEGRATED COURSES AT THE COLLEGE**

English has been integrated in some legal study courses. A course entitled Legal Terminology with three contact hours but zero credit hour in Plan One and Plan Two was taught to all college students intermittently. The same course was then taught again in Plan Four-Six but this time with three contact hours and three credit hours. However, it was confined to those students majoring in Commercial Law in Plan Six. Different English language and Law faculties taught this course over the past years, with each faculty using a different approach and curriculum. However, students generally

faced difficulties coping with the course due to their English language inadequacies and they resorted to memorizing legal terms, which were taught mainly through translation from English to Arabic. In other words, while the course provided the students with additional legal knowledge, it failed to equip them with any language skills for various contexts requiring natural, genuine and interactive use of the target language.

Moreover, English was integrated in a course entitled Companies Law and Introduction to Law in Plan Five and was again taught to those majoring in Commercial Law. English language was further integrated in 13-three-contact and three credit-hour courses taught to those specializing in Commercial Law in Plan Five and Plan Six (see Table 1).

**Table 1: English Language Integrated Courses**

Plan	Year	Course Title	Contact Hours	Credit Hours	Taught to
1	1997-00	Legal Terminology	3	0	All college students
2	2001-02	Legal Terminology	3	0	All college students
3	2003-04	-----	-	-	-----
4	2005	Legal Terminology	3	3	All college students
5	2006	Legal Terminology	3	3	All college students
		Introduction to Law	3	3	
		Companies Law	3	3	
6	2007-10	Legal Terminology	3	3	Commercial Law
		Maritime Law	3	3	
		Air Law	3	3	
		Banking Law	3	3	
		International Investment Law	3	3	
		Electronic Law	3	3	
		Capital Market Law	3	3	
		Trade Bills	3	3	
		Commercial Contracts	3	3	
		International Trade	3	3	
		Commercial Agencies	3	3	
		Industrial Ownership and Trade Marks	3	3	
		Regional and International Commercial Arbitration	3	3	
		Bankruptcy	3	3	

## THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE (IRAC) REPORT

Given the confusion underlying the policies and practices of the different parties involved in the College then, a decision was taken by SQU Vice Chancellor in late 2007 to invite an International Review and Assessment Committee (IRAC) to conduct a review of the College of Law. The IRAC comprised Professor Ian Holloway, the Chair of IRAC from the University of Western Ontario, three panel members: Dr. Kumar Amirthalingam from the National University of Singapore, Mr. Howard Bennett from the University of Nottingham and Professor Clive Walker from the University of Leeds, and Nenatte Love, as the panel secretary from the University of Ontario. The IRAC members held meetings with different senior leaders and stakeholders at the College and SQU and in the legal profession in the Sultanate.

In their report, Holloway et al. (2008) state that they were inspired by a guiding principle, "... that the College of Law must be relevant to the needs of Oman both as they are today and as they are likely to be tomorrow" (p. 1) to aspire to become "the leader among higher education institutions in the region" and "a centre for learning where individuals can develop their capabilities" (p. 1) and "... go on to successful careers not only in Oman, but throughout the Gulf, and in leading commercial centres around the world, including places like London and New York" (p. vi). They stress that "... the College of Law should be viewed partly as an instrument of national development and as a projection of Oman's culture and values" (p. 6). They emphasize that the College of Law has a significant role to play in the social and economic development and diversification of the Sultanate.

However, Holloway et al. (2008) believe "... that the College of Law is not meeting the needs of either its students or the country in terms of programme design and content" (p. 6). This is in reference to the different simultaneously existing programs or systems which they consider as problematic and confusing to students due to their overlapping nature. Holloway et al. (2008) further disagree with the notion of formal specialization in Year Three and Four and the problem of insufficient places allocated for the Commercial Law stream (19 students only), being "... the most attractive option" (p. 31) which contributed to producing "... deep students discontent" (p. 31).

Furthermore, they suggest that the undergraduate faculty-student ratio at the College should be 1:20 to 1:25, depending on the various administrative and technical circumstances the faculty may experience throughout the academic year. Holloway et al. (2008) believe that this ratio facilitates engagement in “genuine interactive teaching” (p. 22).

They further report that the college graduates lack an operational command of English language. This consequently gives graduates of Law from English-speaking countries an edge over their college counterparts in terms of job recruitment and has overall negative implications for the success of the college. They stress the importance of communicating in English language to facilitate “modernization” and “internationalization”, as English is considered a tool for science and knowledge acquisition and finding a white-collar job.

Central to the achievement of the college’s objectives, according to Holloway et al. (2008), is the design and implementation of a bilingual degree programme which considers competence in English a priority. They further suggest that a score between 5 and 5.5 on IELTS, in the preliminary year at the Language Centre on SQU campus and prior to enrolling in the degree program, “... sufficient for the students to operate within the College’s reformed programme of legal study on a bilingual basis” (p. 37). They expect the students “... to use their English regularly ... throughout the course of their degree ... to be able to raise their level to at least 6.0 IELTS” (p. 37), on completion on their 1+4 model program. They recommend achieving this through teaching 25-40% of the program courses in English. They recommend an additional dimension of skills in the curriculum, i.e. training in learning, researching, writing, presenting and advocating.

Acquisition of such a blend of linguistic and legal skills will thus put the college faculty and students in a position to establish active links, partnership, and collaboration with international faculty and institutions for research culture improvement and diversification, and to help “... create opportunities for students to gain international exposure during their law studies” (Holloway et al., 2008, p. 13).

## CONTENT LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING

Marsh (2002) states that Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) refers to “situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language” (p. 15). Dalton-Puffer (2007) considers CLIL as occurring in “...educational settings where a language other than the students’ mother tongues is used as a medium of instruction” (p. 1). In other words “CLIL involves learning to use language appropriately whilst using language to learn effectively” (Coyle, 2006, p. 9). Sherris (2008) broadly defines CLIL as “...task-based instruction and assessment of knowledge, skills, and academic language within a content area” (p. 1). Lorenzo (2007), cited in Costa and D’Angelo (2011) perceives that CLIL offers a new language focus, learning vision and language teaching methodology.

*Through CLIL, the focus changes from language as a vehicle of culture to language as a means of communication in academic settings. A new vision of language called for a new vision of learning. CLIL is linked to experiential views of second language acquisition and consequently a new methodology of language teaching (p.28).*

The integration of content and language emerged as a result of significant experiences and discussions in teaching English as a Foreign Language and bilingual education, which view successful language acquisition as best occurring when language is learnt for purposeful and meaningful communication in significant social situations, when content and the target language instruction are integrated to facilitate exposure to and functional use of language learning and when relevant activities lead to successful language learning by positively impacting upon learners’ motivation, exposure to and use of the target language (de Graaff, Koopman, Anikina & Westhoff, 2007).

The world’s preferred target and dominant international language today is English. It is the language of globalization and internationalization. Nettle & Romaine (2002, p. 190) acknowledge that “in today’s global village, however, increasing bilingualism in a metropolitan language, particularly

English, is making the majority of the world's languages in effect minority languages". In Higher Education (HE), therefore, and as it is the case in this study, "globalization influences both language use and the economics of HE" (Coleman, 2006, p. 1). Coleman comments that "while the global status of English impels its adoption in Higher Education, its adoption of English in Higher Education further advances its global influence" (p. 4). Lasagabaster (2008) acknowledges that CLIL has a socio-economic aim as it helps "... prepare students for internationalization, a key word for all education systems" (p. 32) at present.

According to Coyle (2006), CLIL is built on a number of principles, which consider the learners as a creator of their own knowledge and developers of skills, rather than mere acquirers of knowledge and skills. Moreover, learners should think about creating their own interpretation of the content using the target language. Furthermore, interaction in the classroom is fundamental and has important implications for contexts which operate through the medium of a foreign language. Within this vein, Nordmeyer (2010) acknowledges that "viewing a language as a medium of learning helps to illustrate the interdependent and cyclical nature of English skills and subject matter knowledge" (p. 3). Last but not least, development of intercultural awareness, understanding, and global citizenship is fundamental for today's students are vital in the growing context of the global job market at present (Coyle, 2006).

Marsh (1994) considers learning a foreign language by studying subject matter content and learning subject matter through a foreign language as one of the features of a CLIL program. Marsh further considers language in CLIL as a tool for learning and communicating, where the four skills are integrated. Furthermore, the interactive nature of language and its manipulation depend on the disciplinary context, language and context. Another feature of the CLIL program is that discourse rules and lexicon are of utmost importance in the task-oriented curriculum. Last but not least, context determines the language to be used.

According to Xanthou (2011), CLIL draws on theories from the work of Krashen, Vygotsky, Piaget, and Cummins. It combines theories of implicit language acquisition, language development through social interaction, construction of knowledge when linked to prior knowledge



and the simultaneous acquisition of academic and social aspects of the language. Furthermore, de Graaff et al. (2007) acknowledge that CLIL is “consistent with communicative, task-based and content-based language teaching” approaches through using the target language as a “functional medium of communication and information” in order to achieve fluency (p. 12). Gaballo (2010) points out that “CLIL is not a new form of language education, but it is not a new form of subject education either: it is an innovative fusion of both (p 2).

CLIL has been described as a “flexible”, “adaptable”, and “dynamic” (Coyle, 2006; Gaballo, 2010). It is adaptable and dynamic because it is an educational path and pedagogical approach that suits all contexts, sectors, ages, and educational stages (Coyle, 2006). CLIL is further flexible because it has three exposure proportions through the curriculum (Nowak, 2011). They are: low exposure (5-15%), medium exposure (15-50%), and high exposure (over 50%). CLIL has been also described as a “lifelong concept” (Coyle, 2006) that can introduce and promote deep and lasting educational change, as it “... goes beyond language learning” (Gaballo, 2010, p. 6). CLIL stresses language learning rather than language teaching (Pistorio, 2009) and helps students to reach high levels of competence in the target language, which is at the same time the medium of communication through exposure “... to a considerable amount of language while learning content” (Gaballo, 2010, p. 6). To Pistorio, CLIL powerfully impacts language learning and drives motivation.

From elementary school CLIL classes to university lectures, students can develop valuable thinking skills and build background knowledge in the context of learning English. Content-based language instruction motivates students through the interaction of English with content they need or want to learn; learners become connected to the learning communities in which they are studying (Nordmeyer, 2010, pp. 4-5).

CLIL thus helps to integrate the four skills and improve the target language competence through the use of meaningful tasks and activities related to the content area, which promote collaborative problem solving and evaluating solutions and subsequently, prepare students for a range of academic demands laid by their existing and future programs (Sherris, 2008). Put differently, “CLIL classroom creates a meaningful context for authentic

academic communication” (Nordmeyer, 2010, p. 3), which includes “... concepts, key vocabulary, grammar, and discourse necessary to accomplish content-area tasks” (Sherris, 2008, p. 1). Gaballo (2010) summarizes CLIL by stating that “... learners are empowered to acquire knowledge while actively engaging their own powers of perception, communication and reasoning” (p. 6). Learning outcomes in CLIL, as explained by Marsh, Cenoz and Hornberger (2007) cited in Nordmeyer (2010), “... tend to focus on achieving higher levels of awareness and skill in using language in real-life situations, alongside the learning of subject matter” (p. 233). The three authors describe this approach as an amalgamation of language learning and subject learning.

Lorenzo, Casal & Moore (2009) investigated the language planning and policy implementation of a CLIL bilingual program in Andalusia in Southern Spain. They found that there was sufficient evidence about CLIL learners showing greater gains than their monolingual peers, content-focused instruction influencing incidental learning and positive transfer of language and the relevance of team teaching between content and language specialists as a means of providing a wider range of discourse input for the learners. Xanthou (2011) further found that teaching content through second language facilitates language learning in purposeful settings, linguistics interaction among teachers and learners and among learners themselves, and social and academic aspects of the target language. According to Wiesemes (2005), CLIL, as viewed by students, raises linguistics competence, confidence, expectations, and cultural and global awareness and develops a wide range of skills. Pinkley (2012) acknowledges that “... proponents of CLIL list several key benefits for students: increased motivation, meaningful use of English to reach immediate, real-life goals, development of multicultural awareness, and preparation for future studies and work in a global context” (p. 2). These are benefits which SQU aims to obtain through adopting the CLIL approach.

## **THE NEW DEGREE PLAN**

In 2009, the College of Law initiated the design of the new bilingual degree plan taking into consideration the need to equip students with English language and legal practical skills to meet the needs and demands of the local

job market. The new degree plan was inspired by a very limited number of contexts round the world, for example, the Francophone Quebec province in Canada where higher education is bilingual using French and English side by side and where Latin Law or Civil Law system, which focuses mainly on provision of theoretical knowledge is combined with Anglo-American Law or Common Law system, which pays sufficient attention to acquisition of professional skills.

The 18-month process of getting the new degree plan approved in its final form was initiated by the Dean of the College who joined the College in 2009. He prepared the first draft of the plan and sent it to the college faculty with PhD and members of an *ad hoc* technical committee which included professors representing all specializations in the college. The recipients were given two weeks to submit their feedback. Two months later, the fifth and final draft of the new degree plan, which incorporated all the proposed changes and amendments, was ready and sent to the two Public Law and Private Law departments at the College for their feedback. Further modifications were proposed by the members of the two departments and appraised by the College Board which finalized the plan and sent it to the University Academic Council (UAC). The UAC decided to send the plan to a number of external assessors for evaluation. They were the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of National Economy, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Public Prosecution, Central Bank of Oman, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, University of United Arab Emirates, Pharos University in Alexandria, G.L.E. Oman Law Firm, Said Al-Shahri Office for Legal Consultation and Ian Holloway, Dean and Professor of Law at the University of Western Ontario and Chair of IRAC. The UAC approved the new degree plan and its commencement date (September 2011 which was postponed to September 2012) subject to necessary minor amendments which did not include the bilingual aspect of the plan as suggested by the assessors.

Nine English-medium college core courses (27 credit hours) from the Public Law Department and the Private Law Department have been selected to be taught in English. Two of these nine courses are English For Law One and English For Law Two, with each allocated three credit hours, but six contact hours. The other seven legal courses are Principles of Economy, Principles of International Public Law, International Organizations,

Commercial Companies, Sale and Lease Contracts, Maritime Law and Banking Law (see Table 2). It is noteworthy that apart from English For Law One and Two, the other seven courses are associated with Economics, Commercial Law and International Law, as knowledge generating from these courses is associated with domestic and international legal relations. In other words, while the domestic judicial context requires the use of Arabic language, the international one, on the other hand, requires English language.

**Table 2: English-Medium College Requirement Courses (27 Credit Hours)**

Course Title	Credit Hours
English Language for Law (1)	3
Principles of Economy	3
Principles of International Public Law	3
International Organizations	3
English Language for Law (2)	3
Commercial Companies	3
Sale and Lease Contracts	3
Maritime Law	3
Banking Law-Trade Bills- Bankruptcy	3
Total	27

Students are further required to choose four English-medium college elective courses (12 credit hours) out of a total of 14 offered by both Departments. These are Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law, International Relations, International Economy, Criminology, International Penal Law, Intellectual Property Law, International Trade Contracts, Commercial Contracts, Law of Oil and Gas, Law of Capital Market, Law of Arbitration and a Final Project (see Table 3).

**Table 3: English-Medium College Elective Course (12 Credit Hours)**

Course Title	Credit Hours
a) Public Law Courses	
Human Rights	3
International Humanitarian Law	3
International Relations	3
International Economy	3
Criminology	3

International Penal Law	3
Final Project	3
b) Private Law Courses	
Law of Intellectual Property	3
Law of Oil and Gas	3
Law of Capital Market	3
Commercial Contracts	3
International Trade Contracts	3
Law of Arbitration	3
Final Project	3

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Thus, approximately 30% of the courses offered in the new degree plan are delivered in English. Students are required to complete 132 credit hours spread over eight semesters to be eligible to graduate with a Bachelor of Law degree from SQU. By contrast, students graduated in Plan One after they had completed 140 credit hours, 144 credit hours for Law specialists and 147 credit hours for Sharia specialists in Plan Two and 132 credit hours in Plan Three-the new bilingual degree plan.

Apart from English For Law One and Two, the choice of such legal course to be taught in English is mainly inspired by the practices found in the local job market. In other words, aspects like Conciliation and Arbitration, Diplomatic and Consular Representation, Foreign Legal Affairs, Legal Advising and Registries of International Relations require use of English language in Oman.

English For Law One and Two are thus of a specific nature and aim to consolidate the concepts associated with using English language in international legal relations through helping students to improve their ability to read and prepare legal documents. They further aim at developing students' research and analytical abilities when using English language for international legal relations. Both courses lead to developing students' research abilities through collecting data to produce legal written documents. These two courses have been written by in-house experts from the Language Centre at SQU. Al-Issa (2007) found that students at the College of Law perceive learning legal English important for finding a white-collar job in Oman.

It is noteworthy that SQU students majoring in Medicine, Science, Engineering, Business, Agriculture and other humanities-based specializations, which require use of English language, like teaching English at the College of Education and English language literature and translation at the College of Arts, for example, are also required to take core courses of a similar nature serving a similar purpose.

However, prior to taking these two courses at the College of Law and any other legal courses offered by the new bilingual degree plan, students will be required to attend a General Foundation Program (GFP) which comprises of English language, Applied Mathematics and Computing. The aim of taking English language at the GFP is for the students to extend their ability to become active participants in their post-secondary or higher education. Examples of “ability extension” and “active participation” are paraphrasing information, preparing and delivering a short talk using library resources, participating in discussions of topics relevant to their studies, skimming and scanning, reading texts and extracting specific information in a specific time, reading extensively long texts related to their area of study and answering questions which require analytical skills, taking notes and responding to questions about the topic, and producing written texts of variable nature and length.

For a student to be eligible to attend the College of Law bilingual degree program, he/she has to pass Applied Mathematics and Computing components and score 6 on the IELTS. However, all students sit for a placement test prior to enrolling in the GFP and are eligible to start their bilingual degree program at the College of Law, provided they satisfy the aforementioned requirements in the three components of the GFP.

It is noteworthy that while the GFP is a compulsory entrance qualification for Omani degree programs, meeting additional GFP exit and higher education entrance standards may be required depending on the program offered, which are not synonymous across the continuum as they include locally and internationally sourced diploma and degree programs.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper attempted to discuss the change in direction adopted and implemented by SQU and the College of Law policy makers to enhance the English language ability of the College's graduates in a powerfully English language communication dominated world. The program, if implemented well, can impact students, the college, SQU and the Sultanate. Students will see the relevance of learning an international language like English within a meaningful context and develop the needed adequacy and multicultural awareness which will have psychological, social and economic implications for their future. Proper implementation of the program can impact the College and SQU's image as providers of quality education and create further opportunities for international collaborative research links and partnerships which can have positive implications for SQU world ranking. As far as Oman is concerned, one can argue that producing leaders in Law with an English language competence advantage and edge is likely to positively impact Oman's economic development through taking on the different available jobs and the ones which are already occupied by the expatriate labour force due to their linguistic supremacy and legal technical skills. This is in addition to pursuing law-related jobs abroad, particularly in the neighbouring countries which will largely contribute to solving the domestic employment dilemma.

The change in direction is unique and the first of its kind in the Arab World in particular and perhaps, the Developing World in general with respect to the field of Law and in a context where English is a Foreign Language (EFL). It is further inspired by an official bilingual context like Canada and can have positive implications for other similar contexts.

SQU, thus has experience in implementing CLIL programs in other colleges. However, the integration of English language within legal studies in an EFL context like Oman can potentially pose different kinds of academic, technical and administrative challenges that may unfold with time and provoke further research.

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